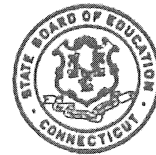


STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee
Testimony of the Connecticut State Department of Education
September 24, 2014

Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Good afternoon, Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and Members of the Committee. My name is Martha Deeds and I am the special assistant to the Commissioner for the State Department of Education. With me is Dr. Patricia Anderson, Education Consultant in the Bureau of Special Education. Thank you for this opportunity to provide information to the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee for the scope of the topic on: Transitional Services for Youth and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) that focuses on the transition from secondary school completion to young adulthood (up to age 25).

According to the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA), "Autism means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction . . . that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences."

Any student who receives a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder that impacts educational performance adversely is eligible for specialized instruction under the educational classification of autism in special education programs, as determined through the planning and placement team (PPT) process. Students identified with autism have significantly diverse need sets related to functional impairment and adaptive skills due to the impact of the disorder across communication, socialization and daily living skills.

The differing degrees of functional impairment combined with a lack of generalization skills require educational teams to assist families to coordinate resources and strategies with the student around many complicated factors that could potentially impact a student's transition to adulthood, such as: emotional rigidity; difficulty with change; decreased impulse control; poor planning for the future and seeing the "big picture"; poor communication skills of expressive, receptive and social pragmatics; and addressing how to produce a meaningful day and lifetime of positive outcomes.

Under federal legislation, IDEA as well as the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, public agencies (school districts/local education agencies) are required to develop and annually update appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist a student in reaching those goals beginning not later than the first individualized education program (IEP) to be in effect when the student turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the PPT (34 CFR Section 300.320).

Transition services for all students as defined under IDEA are “a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the student’s movement from school to post-school activities, including: postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.” The coordinated set of activities for an individual student must be based on his or her needs, taking into account strengths, preferences and interests, and includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation (34 CFR Section 300.43).

Entitlement to public special education typically ends when a student receives a regular education diploma or at the end of the school year in which the student turns 21. Connecticut is one of only a handful of states that continues to provide transition services to approximately 20-25 percent of the students receiving special education services who have met all academic requirements for graduation but for whom the PPT determines are in need of additional transition services. These services must be individualized but have resulted in an explosion of community-based transition services in college, university and other community settings for 18-21 year-olds and include students with both moderate and more significant ASD. One of the roles of the PPT is to facilitate the transition to post-school supports for the student and family, such as adult service agencies (e.g., Bureau of Rehabilitation Services – BRS, Department of Developmental Services – DDS, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services – DMHAS); community supports (e.g., American Job Centers, local mental health authorities – LMHAS; municipal social services), and other privately funded programs and services. Post-school supports and resources are limited for all students with disabilities and are based on a student’s eligibility for services rather than entitlement, but the unique challenges for ASD students in post-school environments have yet to be fully addressed.

The challenges to meet the needs of all students, and this diverse population in particular, remain. The Connecticut State Department of Education is positioned to support districts in the implementation of transition services for students and their families with coordinated efforts between employers, institutions of higher education, appropriate state agencies and other organizations as determined by the PPT process.